

This is a huge deal, and it is a major, major educational issue.

You may remember that last spring the First Lady and I and a large delegation of Members of Congress and others went to Africa. And it was the first time a sitting American President had ever taken an extensive trip to several countries in sub-Saharan Africa. It had never happened before. We visited a school in Uganda that will soon be linked to Pine Crest by the Internet. We were actually there.

When you see that school, if you have the visual link through the Internet, you want to give those kids some new maps, you'll want to send them some books, you'll want to do a lot of things, but you'll also know that they are beautiful, good, highly intelligent, and immensely, immensely eager to be connected to the rest of the world and to share a common future with our children.

So this is very important. Unfortunately, nearly half of our schools don't have the wiring necessary to support basic computer systems. We're doing a great job, and it's not just the Government—private sector, local districts, everybody—a fabulous job of getting these computers out into the classrooms. More and more, there is good educational software. But what we are going to do when the actual wiring is not there? We have to do this.

So again, I ask Congress to pass the funds—in the balanced budget—for the connection for the Internet. It's a huge thing. And it has more potential to dramatically revolutionize and equalize education, if the teachers are properly trained, than anything else. And in our plan,

we have funds for teacher training as well. Otherwise, you'll wind up having the kids know more about it. *[Laughter]* We can't afford to have that. *[Laughter]*

So that's what I'm here to say. Number one, let's get people out of the housetrailer and get them out of the falling-down buildings and give our kids something to be proud of and send them the right signal and have the physical facilities we need. We've got a plan to do it, with the right kind of tax cut; it's in the balanced budget. Number two, let's fund 100,000 teachers and take average class size down to 18 in the early grades. Number three, let's fund the money necessary to enable all of our classes and all of our libraries in all of our schools to be hooked up to the Internet by the year 2000. If we do that we're going to be very, very proud of how our kids turn out in the years ahead.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:45 p.m. at Pine Crest Elementary School. In his remarks, he referred to Pine Crest teacher Carla McEachern, who introduced the President; Paul L. Vance, superintendent, Nancy J. King, president, and Geonard Butler, student member, Montgomery County Board of Education; Nancy S. Grasmick, State superintendent of schools; State Senator Ida G. Ruben; Isiah Leggett, president, Montgomery County Council; and Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend of Maryland. The President also referred to the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

Remarks at Hillcrest Elementary School in Orlando, Florida September 9, 1998

Thank you very much. When President Waldrip—*[laughter]*—was up here speaking, I had two overwhelming thoughts: One is that even though I had been made a member of the PTA, she was one incumbent president I could never defeat in an election. *[Laughter]* My second thought was, I wish I could take her to Washington for about a month. It might change the entire atmosphere up there. *[Laughter]* It was great. She was unbelievable.

Let me say how delighted I am to be here at Hillcrest. I want to thank Principal Scharr for making me feel so welcome. And Clair Hoey, thank you for what you said about the education of our children. And thank you both for the comments you made about the First Lady and the work we have done over the years for children and for education.

I'd like to thank the Governor of Puerto Rico, Pedro Rossello, my longtime friend, for being

here. It's quite fitting that you would be here at this school, which is committed to bilingualism and to a multicultural future for America.

I'd like to thank three Members of the United States Congress who came with me today, Representatives Corrine Brown, Robert Wexler, and Peter Deutsch. They're all here in the front row, and thank you for coming. Thank you, Anne MacKay, for being here. And I'd like to thank the State representatives who are here, Shirley Brown, Lars Hafner, and Orange County Chair Linda Chapin, and the superintendent of the schools, Dennis Smith.

Let me say to all of you, I was so excited when I heard about this school because it really does embody what I think we should be doing in education and, in a larger sense, what I think we should be trying to do with our country. And I'd like to begin by just saying a few words about it.

First of all, the principal has already outlined it better than I could, along with what your teacher and your PTA president said, but this is a school that has a lot of different kids in it, not only different ethnic groups, they have different religions; they have different cultural heritages; their parents have different financial circumstances—I would imagine breathtakingly different—and yet, if you look at them all together, they're all a part of our future.

And we say in our Constitution, we say in our laws, that every one of them is equal not only in the eyes of God but in the eyes of their fellow Americans. This school is trying to make that promise real for all of them. And in creating a community in which they all count and all have a chance to live up to the fullest of their God-given abilities, they're doing what we in America ought to be doing.

I also think some of the strategies are very good. I think the school uniform policy is a good one. I've tried to promote it because I think it promotes learning and discipline and order and gives kids a sense of solidarity and takes a lot of heat off parents without regard to their income and sort of reinforces the major mission of the school. I think that's a good thing. I think having a school-based academic strategy is important. I think the literacy programs are profoundly important. And I'm very glad you are involved in reading recovery.

So there are so many things that I think are quite good about this school, and I thank you

for giving me and Lieutenant Governor MacKay the chance to come by here today.

I want to talk about what we're trying to do in Washington for education and to support not only this school but the truly extraordinary effort that Governor Chiles and Lieutenant Governor MacKay have made here over the last few years to support Florida's schools. And let me begin by backing up a step.

I'm very grateful as an American to have had the chance to serve and to be a part of what our people have accomplished in the last 6 years: to have the lowest unemployment rate in a generation; to have in just a few more days the first balanced budget and surplus in 29 years; to have the lowest crime rate in 25 years; and the smallest percentage of our people on welfare in 29 years; and the lowest inflation rate in 32 years; and the highest homeownership in American history. And we did it while downsizing the National Government to its smallest size in 35 years and investing more in States and localities and schools. I'm grateful for what all of the American people have done together.

But my focus today is on what we should do with that. What should we do with that? Because normally, if people have been through some very trying times and very challenging times and they reach a kind of plateau, the easiest thing to do is to sort of say, "Whew, now let's just sort of sit back, relax, and enjoy it." I think that would be a mistake, because the world is changing very fast. You see that, don't you, if you pick up and see what's happened in the stock market—you know? We had a great big day, yesterday; we had not such a good week or so before that. And when you read and you say, "Well, why is all this happening? Are a bunch of companies going broke or are a bunch of new companies making a lot of money?" And you read between the lines and see, no, no, it's a lot of things that are happening around the world. What does that mean?

The more we become a part of the world in America, with the diversity of our population, the more America becomes a part of the world beyond our borders in our economic and other partnerships. And the world is changing so fast that I believe what we should do with these good times is not to pat ourselves on the back but to say, "Hey, thank goodness. We finally have the security and the resources to face the

long-term challenges of this country. And that is what we intend to do with our good times.”

That is what I have asked the American people, in this season when as citizens we think about voting, to think about: What are we going to do to deal with the long-term challenges of the country? When these children get out of high school, all the baby boomers will start retiring. I know that; I’m the oldest of the baby boomers. *[Laughter]* The baby boom generation are roughly Americans between the ages of 52 and 34. And until this group of schoolchildren that came into school the last 2 years, we were the biggest group of Americans ever.

Now, if we retire without making some changes in the Social Security system and reforming the Medicare system so it takes care of seniors but does it in a way that doesn’t put unconscionable burdens on younger people—if we don’t do that, then by the time we retire, one of two things is going to happen: Either the baby boomers are not going to have a very good retirement, or we’re going to have it at the expense of lowering their standard of living, because there will be, for a period of time, two people working—only two people working for every one person retired. No one wants that.

We’re in good shape now. That’s why I say we shouldn’t spend any of this surplus that, hopefully, we will have for several years, that we’ll begin to realize on October 1st. We shouldn’t spend it all in a tax cut or a spending program until first we know we’ve taken care of Social Security and Medicare, because I don’t know anybody in my generation that wants to undermine their future to take care of our retirement. That’s a big issue.

We have to prove in this global economy with, as you know in Florida, with a lot of global warming—you had all those fires this year; you had the hottest year in history, the hottest month you ever had in June—you know about that. We’ve got to prove we can deal with environmental challenges and grow the economy. Believe it or not, there are a lot of people that don’t believe that. There are still a lot of people who think that it is impossible to have an economic growth in any advanced society unless you are deteriorating the environment. I don’t believe that, I don’t think the evidence supports that. We’ve got to prove that. We have to prove that.

We have to prove that we can give both quality and affordable health care to all our people, the 160 million people in managed care plans. People still want to know if they get hurt, they can go to an emergency room; if they need a specialist, they can see it; and their medical records are going to be protected. We have to prove we can have the most cost-effective health system and still maintain quality.

So we’ve got these big challenges, and we’ve got to deal with all these challenges in the global economy you’ve been dealing with, reading about. But let me say to you there is no more important challenge than giving every one of these children, especially if they start out in life without all the advantages that a lot of other children have, a chance to get a world-class education. There is no more important long-term challenge for America.

That is what will make us one America, whole, together, respecting each other’s differences, when everybody’s got a chance to sort of live out their dreams.

You know, we’ve all got this on our mind. I don’t know if you all know this, but when I got off the plane today, the young man that caught Mark McGwire’s home run last night was there waiting for me because he was flown down to Disney World today, which I thought was a real hoot—*[laughter]*—with his family. And last night, late last night, I talked to Mark McGwire and his wonderful young son, who’s in uniform and always out there. And I got to thinking about what’s Mark McGwire going to do with the rest of his life? What’s he going to do with the rest of his season?

And I’ll tell you what I think he’ll do. I think he’ll hit more home runs and play more baseball and do more things. But that’s what you’ve got to think about America. How would you feel if Mark McGwire announced, “Well, I’ve been working real hard to do this all my life, and if it’s all the same to you, I think I’ll skip the last 18 games.” *[Laughter]* Right? Or, “If it’s all the same to you, I think I’ll just stand up there and see how many times I could walk.” You would be puzzled, at least, wouldn’t you?

Well, that’s the kind of decision we have to make as Americans. What are we going to do with our good economy? What are we going to do with our improving social fabric? I’d like to see our country become modeled on what you’re trying to do here at Hillcrest.

And in specific terms, I want to say there are some things before the Congress today, some specific education bills that I think respond to the needs of the American people. And no matter how well you're doing, you know there are still some needs out there. I was especially impressed by what you said you were doing with new mothers and newborn children and trying to get kids off to a good start. Hillary and I had a conference on early childhood and the brain not very long ago, and I think we have all underestimated how much good can be done in those first couple of years of life. And that's very good.

Let me tell you—sort of set the scene here. The Department of Education today is releasing a report that shows that while we're making progress, students that live in high-poverty areas continue to lag behind other students in fourth grade reading and math scores. Fewer than half of all the fourth graders in the high-poverty areas are scoring at basic levels of performance in math.

Now, I will say again, you rebuke that whole idea that there has to be a difference in people based on the income of their parents or the nature of their neighborhood. That's what you're trying to prove does not have to be. And I believe that as well.

So let me just briefly review the agenda that these Members of Congress—these three here—are supporting, that we're going to try to pass in what is just a very few weeks left in this legislative session.

I want smaller classes in the early grades all across America. You've got that here. We have a program that would hire 100,000 teachers in the early grades. If we hired the 100,000 teachers—it's in our balanced budget—we could lower class size to an average of 18 in the early grades all across America.

I want Congress to help me create safer schools, to continue to build partnerships with local law enforcement and schools. Just this morning, the Justice Department has released over \$16 million to 155 law enforcement agencies across the country to make sure we have community-based organizations to prevent crime in the first place.

This school—I understand you do a lot of work and loan out some computers so families can learn about computers. I think it's important that we hook up every classroom and every library and every school in America by the year

2000. We have a bill to do that in Congress, and we want to pass that bill.

We also have responses specifically to that education report I mentioned, a bill in Congress to create what we call education opportunity zones, as well as expanding funding for Title I. It would give extra help to the classrooms—the schools that are prepared to end social promotion but not tag kids as failures, that want to have after-school programs, that want to have summer school programs, that want to have extra help for kids who need it, that need more resources to do the kind of intensive effort that this reading recovery program here, for example, requires. Everybody knows it's one of the best programs in the world. Unfortunately, too many schools don't do it because it costs money to do it, because you really have to give intensive help to these children at an early age.

So I think that's important. A part of that would be paying the college expenses of 35,000 young people who agree when they get out of college to go out and teach off their college loans by going into underserved areas, in urban and rural areas in America. I think that's worth doing. I want to—[*applause*]*—thank you.*

And finally, we're trying to fully fund our America Reads program, which will make sure that we give enough reading tutors and trained volunteers to enough schools to make sure every 8-year-old in this country—every one—can read a book independently by the time they're in the third grade.

Now, this is very important stuff. And so far I can't tell you how it's going to come out in Washington. But remember, I'm not increasing the deficit. This is in the balanced budget that I presented to Congress. The money is there. So the issue is not whether the money is there; the issue is what are our priorities and what are we going to do with the money. Now, notwithstanding what Representatives Wexler, Deutsch, and Brown want to do, the House of Representatives voted to actually cut \$2 billion off these programs. The Senate has not done so yet. They've been a little more encouraging. I don't want this to be a partisan issue; education should be an American issue. When I go to a school and walk up and down and shake hands with kids, I don't look for a political label on their uniforms. This is an American issue. But it is a big issue.

So I would just ask all of you to make it as clear as you can that you'd like for us in

Washington to put the same priority on education that the parents and the teachers and the kids do at Hillcrest, that you would like for us to try to create an American community like the one that you are trying to create with your children here at this school, and that there are very specific opportunities Congress is going to have in the next 3 weeks where a “yes” vote or a “no” vote is required, and you’d like to see us vote “yes” for our children and our future.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:10 p.m. in the cafeteria. In his remarks, he referred to Susan Waldrup, president, Parent-Teacher Association, Alette Scharr, principal, and Clair Hoey, teacher,

Hillcrest Elementary School; State Representatives Shirley Brown and Lars Hafner; Linda W. Chapin, chair, Orange County Board of Commissioners; Dennis M. Smith, superintendent, Orange County Public Schools; Gov. Lawton Chiles of Florida; gubernatorial candidate Lt. Gov. Buddy MacKay of Florida, and his wife, Anne; and St. Louis Cardinals first baseman Mark McGwire, who broke Major League Baseball’s single-season home run record, his son Matt, and Tim Forneris, the Busch Stadium groundskeeper who retrieved the record-breaking ball. The President also referred to Title I of the Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994 (Public Law 103–382), which amended Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Public Law 89–10).

Remarks at a Florida Democratic Party Luncheon in Orlando September 9, 1998

The President. Thank you so much. Thank you, Jim Pugh, for all the work you’ve done on this dinner and lunch and for helping Buddy through this long campaign. And thank you, Governor Rossello, for everything you’ve said and for your leadership of our Democratic Governors’ Association.

I’d like to thank the Members of Congress who are here, Peter Deutsch, Rob Wexler, Corrine Brown, and your State party chair, Mitch Ceasar. And especially I want to thank Buddy and Anne MacKay for years and years and years of devoted service to the people of Florida and for taking on this campaign and seeing it through to what I predict will be a victory that will surprise some but not me. And I thank them.

I came here today to talk to you about what we’ve done together in the last 6 years and what’s at stake in this election. I think the people of this country have a serious choice to make in November between progress or partisanship, between people or politics, between unity or division.

You have been very good to me here in Florida—to me and to Hillary and to the Vice President and our administration—

Audience member. We love you, Bill!

The President. —and I’m very grateful to you. You have been astonishingly kind and generous to me today. And I will never forget it. If God lets me live to be an old man, I will never forget what Buddy MacKay said today from this platform when he could have said nothing. And so I hope you will just indulge me for a minute while I say that I thank you for that.

I have been your friend. I’ve done my best to be your friend, but I also let you down. And I let my family down, and I let this country down. But I’m trying to make it right. And I’m determined never to let anything like that happen again. And I’m determined—[*ap- plause*—wait a minute, wait a minute. I’m determined to redeem the trust of people like Buddy and Anne, who were with me in 1991—a lot of the rest of you were, too—when nobody but my mother and my wife thought I had a chance to be elected.

When I was over at the Hillcrest School—Buddy and I were over there a few minutes ago, and I was shaking hands with all these little kids out there. And this kid that reminded me a lot of myself when I was that young—he was bigger than the other students and kind of husky—he said, “Mr. President, I want to